

1,000-home development proposed for Shingle Springs

By Richard Chang, Sacramento Bee

Shingle Springs residents are gearing up for a showdown over a proposed 1,000-home mega development off Mother Lode Drive.

The project, named San Stino, will have 1.6 units per acre over a 645-acre tract. Developer Joel Korotkin of San Stino LLP estimates the build-out could take several years, depending on market conditions.

But neighbors are launching a grass-roots effort to stop the proposal. They say the project is too dense and will threaten their rural lifestyle.

"The development is so large it will affect almost all Shingle Springs residents," said Frank Verdin, an organizer for No San Stino, one of two grass-roots groups opposing the development.

No San Stino and the Shingle Springs Community Alliance are asking the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors to halt review of the plan and for the developer to go back to the drawing board.

The county is in the process of preparing an environmental impact review, which will assess the project in terms of traffic, infrastructure and other factors. But officials caution that final approval is still far away.

"For this many lots, you're looking at 10 years or more before you achieve a full build-out," said Pierre Rivas, the county's principal planner.

The stiff opposition from the community has the developer on the defensive.

"We've been very open from the beginning," Korotkin said, noting that San Stino has already been scaled down from the original 1,300 houses proposed two years ago.

"If you think this is going to affect you, we want you to write a comment setting forth your concerns," he said.

El Dorado County's elected leaders are taking note of the growing chorus of criticism.

Supervisor Ray Nutting, who represents Shingle Springs, said he is "very aware" of the constituent backlash against the project.

"I'm very skeptical of the numbers," Nutting said. "My hope is that those numbers come way down. The developer needs to build trust with the community."

Korotkin said that he has followed the application process from the beginning and that the county had previously designated the land as an area for growth in the 2004 General Plan.

The site has historically been a grazing ground for farm animals and is currently zoned as one home for every 5 acres.

Many in Shingle Springs live on plots of 1 acre or more, according to data from the county planning department. Community leaders have expressed concern that the large influx of people could upend the area's rural lifestyle.

"If you take 1,000 homes and multiply that by two, you're looking at 2,000 cars," said Verdin, whose home sits on 8 acres and is 400 feet from the development site. "Traffic is a huge concern. People have to drive because it's rural."

But Korotkin contends that he has made ample provisions to allow San Stino to fit in with the community, including creating a new road to minimize traffic and setting aside 42 percent of the land, or 270 acres, toward open space.

"It's a challenge, but I believe we can do this in a way that doesn't hurt Shingle Springs," he said.

The 30-day public comment period for the environmental impact report ended Friday.

The report is likely to be released by next spring.

Rivas, the county planner, doesn't expect the Board of Supervisors to vote on the project until mid-2014.

"You're looking at years off into the future," he said. "But the project tells me there is a positive outlook in the future of the economy."